

# Think of him as the NFL's media coach

Kevin O'Donnell - myfoxtampabay.com

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TAMPA (FOX 13) - The game is on. NFL draft prospects spend weeks in Tampa at Performance Compound to improve their stock.

Steve Shenbaum, founder and owner of 'Game On,' has made it his career and his passion to coach communication skills to athletes. He has stepped away from the Hollywood cameras to pass on what learned as an actor, teaching and coaching some of the biggest names in sports.

His first client was Pete Sampras in 1997.

"I learned with Pete, who is kind of considered introverted, that he loved to laugh and I realized everyone did," said Shenbaum. "As long as you laugh with and not at. That's kind of the big foundation of Game On, that everyone, no matter what age you are, doesn't matter. What socioeconomic status you are doesn't matter, but everyone loves to be laughed with."

Shenbaum uses improv and humor to build confidence. The focus is to make these players as comfortable during interviews with NFL executives and the media as they are on the playing field.

"I've had some men and women within 10 minutes say, 'Oh, I get it,'" said Shenbaum. "This guy is not a Power Point guy. He's not a 'How's everyone doing?' [with raised voice]. Some it takes a little longer and part of it is their background. Some of these athletes are guarded for a reason."

Dropping their guard enough to show who they are and their personality is the point behind the program. His three keys: authenticity, accountability and creativity. It's not a formula to fit all. It's customized for each individual.

His approach with the Gators' Trey Burton is different than it is with Seminole fullback Chad Abrams. Clemson's Sammy Watkins, who will be the top pick in this classroom, needs more self-promotion.

"Sammy's thing is that he wants to be humble, because he's the guy," said Shenbaum. "I think he doesn't want to be 'that guy' that I'm an All-American. Well, you are an All-American and that's a fantastic thing."

It's preparing for a long process with the payoff coming at the NFL Draft in May. After hours of interviews in Indianapolis at the NFL Combine, players now are making trips around the country and meeting with individual teams on the turf like with the Bucs at One Buc Place.

For players that are prepared like Sammy Watkins, it's an exciting time.

"It's an honor to go in front of the owner of the team and getting a chance to express your feelings, what you've been doing all your life," said Watkins. "Telling them about your family, yourself. For me it's just about being honest and going in there and have fun."

Draft day is payday for the players and the payoff for their coach. Hearing their reaction to what it means to be drafted is the final test.

"I don't want: 'I can't explain this feeling,'" said Shenbaum. "Yes, you can. And you better because you have about \$10-million of reasons to explain that feeling. Because we are sitting in our living rooms wanting to live vicariously through that experience."